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TAGS: PGOV PTER IS EG
SUBJECT: GAZA BORDER UPDATE - FEBRUARY 6, 2008

Classified By: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR
WILLIAM STEWART. REASONS: 1.4 (B) and (D)

1.(C) Egyptian Major General Kamal Nagy updated us on the Gaza situation the morning of February 6. He said that the situation has been "very tense" over the past couple of days, but that the GOE had successfully sealed the last two border openings on February 5. On February 4-5, rock-throwing between Palestinians and GOE forces had escalated into gunfire (Nagy claimed the Palestinians had fired first). 1 Palestinian was killed, and 1 Egyptian Border Guard Force (BGF) colonel was hospitalized. The Egyptian forces also used tear gas and smoke grenades to control "angry Gazans," according to Nagy.

¶2. (C) Nagy said the situation has calmed down today. Egyptian engineers are in place and building a new barrier, which he said would be 1 to 1.5 meters wide by 3.5 meters high. The GOE will begin building the stone and concrete wall immediately. Completion date for the project is unknown, although another MOD source estimated it will take at least two months to complete. DATT noted that the planned wall may obscure direct observation of Philadelphia Corridor and Gaza and require adjustment of current BGF positions.

¶3. (C) In addition, Nagy told us that the GOE had worked out a "deal" with Hamas to repatriate 1500 "stranded" persons (600 Egyptians in Gaza, and 900 Gazans in Egypt). These persons will be repatriated using Salah ad Din crossing (in Rafah) through "closely controlled movements of persons and personal vehicles across the border," according to Nagy.

¶4. (C) Nagy said that although he had heard about Israeli FM Livni's public comments on an additional 750 BGF, he had not heard of any formal proposal by the Israelis. He commented that the entire 750 BGF contingent assigned to Rafah had been available during the recent crisis (although fewer were actually on-duty at any given time due to the BGF's shift work schedule).

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